4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

or other dried fish, *ghee* (clarified butter), honey, tobacco, grinding stones, and straw work (fans, mats, and baskets). It must be remembered that most of the cargo moving around the Middle Eastern waters in small vessels, whether dhows or small coastal steamers, is for the native trade and is destined for native bazaars, which are noted for the cheapness and poor quality of their wares. Once the dhow is loaded it is ready for the trip down the East African coast; however, the Arabs sometimes take a month or more to collect a full cargo.

Upon the *nakhoda* of the dhow rests the responsibility of getting another cargo for continuing down the African coast once the consigned date cargo is discharged. Invariably the *nakhoda* is the nominal owner of his dhow, so he acts as his own agent. As the cargo loaded after the dates are discharged is not on consignment, its selection is a matter of the *nakhoda's* judgment, with an eye to what will sell best in the African markets. However, a cargo that must be regarded as essentially on consignment is that of passengers. On some Africa-bound dhows passengers comprise a considerable portion of the cargo. The competition for passengers is very brisk, so that there is sometimes a race among the various *nakhodas*, who hasten to neighboring ports via motor launch as soon as their ships reach South Arabia to discharge their dates.

Through the dhows there is a constant flow of Arabs from South Arabia and Oman and of Indians from India. The immigrants usually become porters, hawkers, musicians, or beggars, but if they are very industrious, they may end up owning a small shop in the *suq*. Their usual aim in migrating is to work long enough so that they can go home after they save a little money; usually they never make enough to get out. Villiers[16] states that the Italian officials in Mogadiscio checked four thousand passengers on thirty-five dhows that were in the harbor when he was there in 1939. In 1937 the fare along the Hadhramaut coast between ports was three rupees.[17] In 1939 the fare from South Arabia to any African port was only eight rupees for men and twelve for women.[18] In Aden in 1950 the fare for natives traveling as deck passengers on A. Besse and Company dhows with no accommodations was 15 rupees to Berbera, Djibouti, and other ports about 150 miles from Aden; thirty rupees to Massaua, Mukalla, and ports about 450 miles away; and one hundred rupees to Jidda, Port Sudan, or ports approximately one thousand miles from Aden. These were fixed rates on the dhows operated by Besse; other dhows that

[16] A. Villiers, 'The Arab Dhow Trade,' *Middle East Journal*, II (1948), 404.
[17] F. Stark, *A Winter in Arabia* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1940), p. 313.
[18] A. Villiers, *ss*, p. 78.

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

were trading down the coast could easily afford to undercut these rates. 167

As was mentioned above, women are usually charged higher rates for travel on dhows; this is because they have to be segregated and usually manage to make trouble, unintentional as it may be. Villiers[19] gives a graphic description of the nuisance a group of women can cause on an Arab dhow. For centuries women have apparently been creating disturbances on Arab dhows, for Niebuhr, who traveled down the Red Sea on a dhow in 1763, relates that

> In our passage, we found ourselves in danger of a worse misfortune than shipwreck. The females, who were lodged under us, more than once suffered linen, which they were drying, to catch fire, in consequence of which the vessel must have been burnt, if we had not been alarmed by their screams. . . . Those women were indeed extremely troublesome and indiscreet.[20]

Besides the ship's cargo, every member of the crew usually lays in a 439 store of goods that he personally peddles. Each sailor is allowed a sea chest 505 (see Plate 22—bottom), which he fills with print goods, turbans, flashlights, razors, sarongs, cigarettes, and perfumes which are later diluted. The *nakhoda* usually has some rugs or carved wooden chests to peddle (see Plate 17—bottom). Virtually none of this material enters Africa legally, but is for the most part smuggled in. Most of these trivial goods are carried in by the Arabs personally. Villiers[21] relates that he saw one man wear three gowns and eight sarongs, then wrap more sarongs around his knees, and make six trips through customs a day. Sometimes they are detected and stripped, but that is part of the risk. Often the Africans come out in canoes at night and remove the goods in small quantities. Frequently Arabs travel down the African coast on dhows as professional smugglers, living only for the smuggling they can accomplish. This sort of trading has been going on for centuries, for Paris[22] related that '. . . leur navires sont de vraies caravanes dans laquelles tous les matelots ont un intérêt.'

For the Arabs and the Persians, the trip down the African coast is leisurely and slow. It is not unusual for a dhow to stay in a port for three or four weeks haggling over a cargo, only to leave without having transacted any business. There is no rush, simply because there would be a long wait for the southwest monsoon to set in and carry them back north, if

[19] Ibid., p. 78 ff.

[20] C. Niebuhr, *Travels Through Arabia* (Edinburgh: R. Morison and Son, 1792), I, 219. 113

[21] A. Villiers, *55*, p. 143.

[22] F. E. Paris, *Essai sur la Construction Navale des Peuples Extra-Européens* (Paris, Bertrand, [1841]), p. 9. '. . . their ships are true caravans in which every sailor has an interest.'